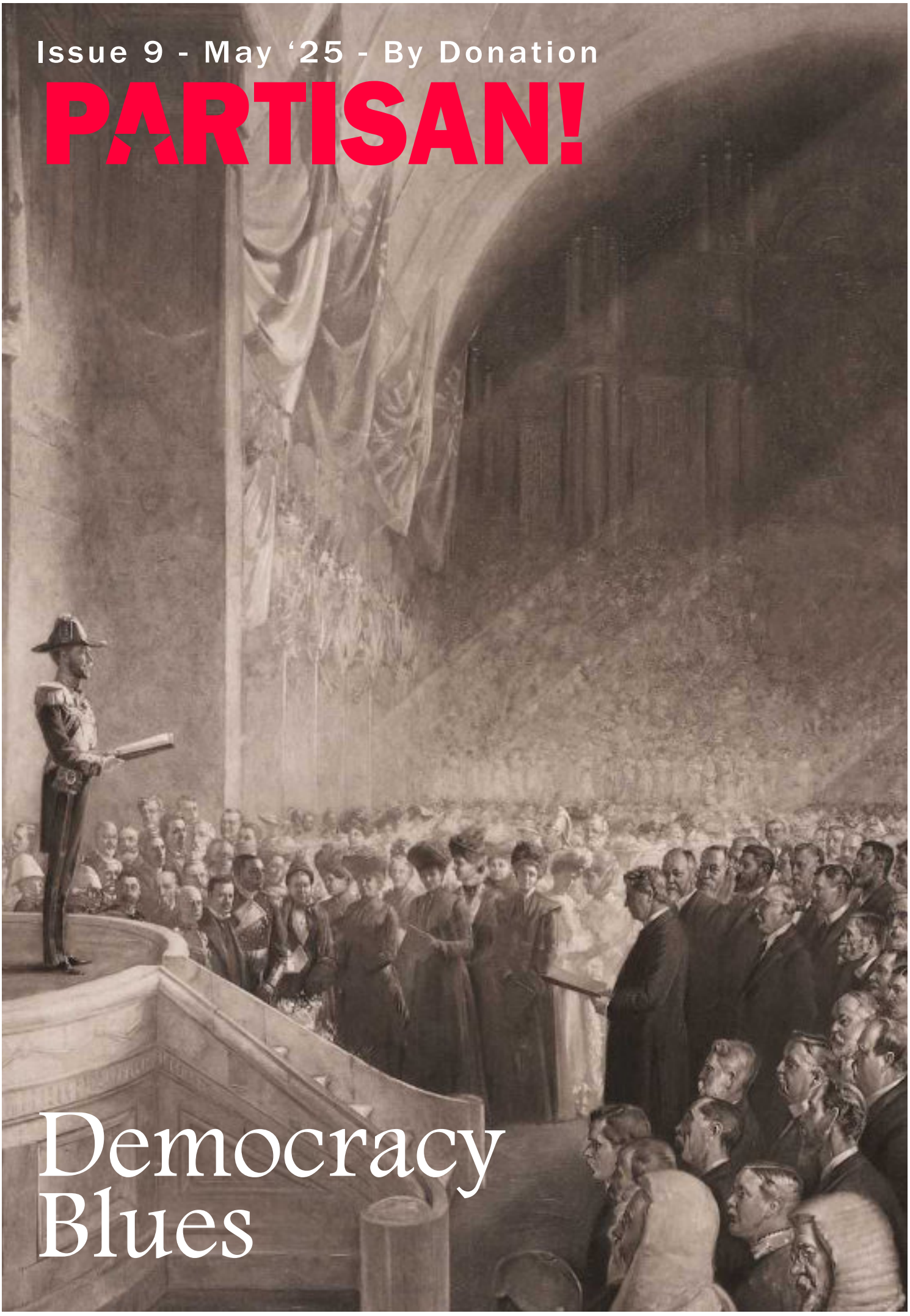
Issue 9 - May ‘25 - By Donation

PARTISAN!



Democracy Blues

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Cover: Tom Roberts, *Opening of the first Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth, 9th May 1901*, 1903

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Subscriptions:

Print: $10 per month
Solidarity: $20 per month

See below for info.

Submissions

Partisan accepts and encourages unsolicited submissions from left-wing radicals and militants of all backgrounds. Articles range from 800-1,000 words, with a maximum of 2,000. Word count is looser for letters, reports, etc, but we would encourage you to keep them concise.

Please proof-read etc prior to submitting. Our staff will also sub-edit as necessary. We publish monthly, so aim to submit before the 25th of the month at the absolute latest (15th-20th is ideal). Simultaneous submissions accepted on a case-by-case basis.

We are primarily interested in topics such as Marxist political economy, political strategy/tactics, engagement with Communists pasts and futures, critiques of Liberalism/Capitalism/etc, interviews, and features. Please include your name, a summary of the article, and any other relevant information (such as photos/images plus sourcing) in an email (see publishing contact).

About Partisan:

Partisan is the official publication of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO). We are a monthly journal of the 'partyist left' in Australia – that section of the left which views the formation of a mass workers party as its primary task.

Alongside the RCO, we fight for a reunification of the left into a party that can carry out the tasks of the communist and workers movement: the establishment of a democratic republic and the dissolution of the capitalist prison-states.

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It is once again election time.

In 2022, Anthony Albanese and the Labor Party smashed almost ten years of uncontested LNP rule, on an ambitious platform of neoliberal reform. In his three year tenure, Albanese has not only failed to live up to these promises (the Voice to Parliament was an embarrassment that was quickly launched down the memory hole), he has managed to be even worse: between attacks against the unions his party is on paper meant to represent (via the CFMEU administration), to attacks against workers and students supporting Palestine, to cutting deals with US imperialists.

These three years of Labor have almost been a disaster. By the time this issue is released, the election would have most likely already taken place, so we can't make many good proscriptions as to what you *should* do for the election. Instead, we should approach the election from a post-perspective: what should communists do after? We already have our election perspectives at hand: we encourage comrades to vote socialist first, put Labor second, and put Greens third.

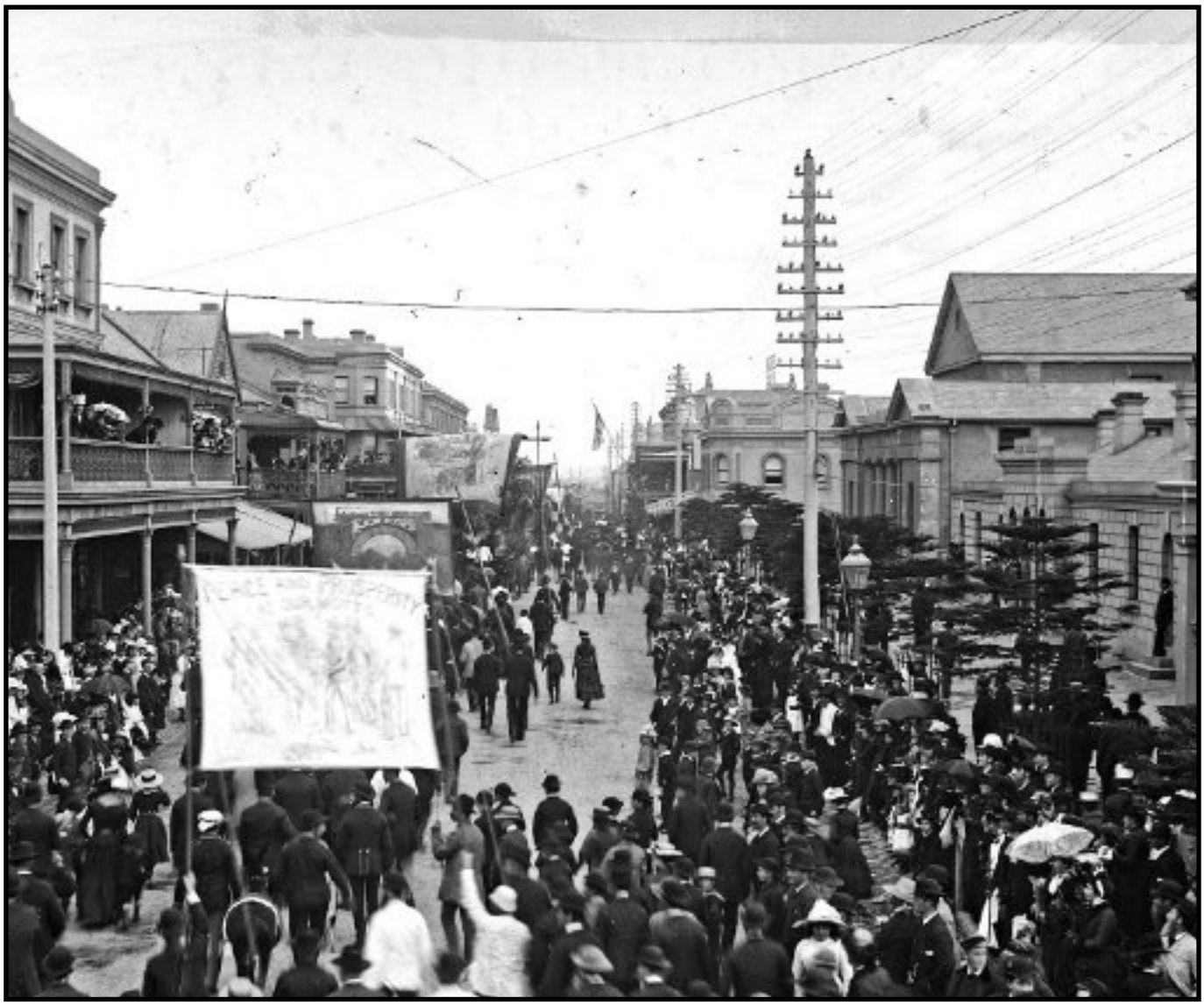
Why vote socialist? If you support socialist politics and policies, you should vote for socialists. We think it's that simple, really. Voting socialist is a small but necessary way to demonstrate your support for socialism in the electoral realm. Why Labor second? Given Labor's attacks against workers and Palestine, this was a controversial and rough decision to make. For better and for worse (mostly worse), the working class still views Labor as "its party", even if much of the working class is critical of it. So we must adopt a different position to Labor, a 'liberal workers party', than to the Greens. We view the Greens as being a party of middle class radicals, who while they often have a left-wing orientation, act more as gendarmes against socialist regroupment than a supplement.

After the election, of course, comrades should keep doing what they were doing before (ideally, less of the bad things, and more of the good things). The 'ideal situation' is that Labor wins (most likely a Labor minority) and we do not have to contest an LNP government. But in the slim likelihood that the LNP wins, our plans should more or less be the same.

Much of the Left kicks up hysterics over elections. Elections are evil! They're distractions from the Real Struggle! This is the most important election of our lives! Democracy is at stake! This issue of Partisan cuts through the slop to get the politics of the issue: whether communists should engage critically with elections to the degree that they are avenues for political struggle (we say: yes).

We wholeheartedly believe a renewed communist party should engage with elections, and put up candidates of its own. But we don't believe the working class can take power through elections - in historical cases of this happening, it only led to the ruin of the movement (see: SPD). But this doesn't mean that we should shy away from elections entirely, or that electoral work is "dirty". Much of the Left carries a syndicalist infliction that tries to convince comrades that the only legitimate, real struggle is that of workers in the workplace. This is by no means *not* an important struggle, but as history shows, restricting yourself to economistic workplace struggles make you as opportunistic as those who restrict themselves to the electoral realm.

Best,
Partisan Staff



Workers march for May Day in Newcastle, 1890. Photo: Ralph Snowball

Keep fighting for Socialism on May Day!

On May 1st, it will be 136 years since the foundation of the Second International for Labour, Socialist, and Marxist parties. On this day, workers across the globe come out into the streets and unite to celebrate and commemorate the struggles of the international working class. May Day is an opportunity to reflect on our long history, assess the past year, and plan for the next.

In doing so, we find three major obstacles that workers face in Australia: the rise of far-right populism, attacks on our standards of living and militant trade unionism, and Australia's alignment with US imperialism.

Trump's election has, rightfully, caused a crisis-of-faith in liberalism. Politics-as-usual has failed, again, to fight the far-right. Many are seeking alternatives to the liberal system. Many are afraid that this far-right wave that is rising in Europe, that has already broken the banks of liberal democracy in the US, is spreading to Australia. The Liberal-National Coalition has trended right under Dutton, adopting a culture-war-first approach to politics.

The notion that this is a movement of the "left-behind" manipulated by a grand, social-media based conspiracy is wrong. In fact, it is a movement of small businesses alongside industrial and resource capital. These forces are reacting against the dominance of global banking capital on the one hand, and the advances made by women and racial minorities since the mid 20th century on the other.

These forces are weak compared to what the

workers' movement could be, but strong compared to our current state. The alliance with liberal capitalists against the far-right has failed, because such an alliance is always to the benefit of the capitalists against the workers. We must build a united front between all workers and workers organisations to exert our class power.

In an echo of the Accords, the Labor Party has swept in to subjugate the workers and restore profitability. They have overseen a choking increase in the cost of living. They have made an example out of the CFMEU, primarily to increase profits in the failing construction sector, but also to intimidate trade unionists into submission.

The disunity and disorganisation of the socialist movement allowed this. Without socialist influence in the union movement, without dedicated involvement supporting the unions, and without militant class solidarity from other unions, we were powerless to stop the attacks on the CFMEU.

The current leadership of the Australian working-class, the Labor Party, continues to support the AUKUS alliance and sell out to US imperialism abroad. However, many working-class activists have supported arms to Ukraine (and the NATO aligned war effort) in the same breath that they condemn Israel and AUKUS, comparing Ukraine to Palestine.

This is a defencist view which picks the side of the US imperialist camp against the Russian imperialist camp – leaving the working class of all countries holding the bag.

We face a workers' movement in the grip of a reformist, nationalist, and class collaborationist leadership. These weaken our movement, and their dominance stops us rebuilding mass working-class militancy.

Our task is to sweep away these ideologies and win the working class over to itself and its own ideology – Socialism.

But the socialist movement reflects these wider obstacles. We are uselessly divided. We do not compete for the leadership of our politics in the workers' movement. Instead, we follow behind the current bankrupt leadership, either in the Labor Party, the Green Party, or unaligned NGOs, union bureaucracies, and activist grouplets. We are wedded to one or another form of cynical opportunism: tailing US imperialism on the one hand, or Russian or Chinese imperialism on the other. So long as these tendencies dominate, we are unable to coherently, explicitly, and effectively agitate for revolutionary politics.

The original demands of the May Day

May Day Poster. Photo: ACTU Institute

International were the eight-hour day, the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace.

On May Day, we raise these demands:

- Completely break with the ideologies of the union, NGO, and reformist party bureaucracies and their mis-leadership of the working class.
- Reject Australian nationalism and imperialism of all stripes – American, Russian, or Chinese.
- First, unite the socialist movement into a single revolutionary party. Second, rebuild a strong and united workers movement.

In sum, we demand a working-class movement that is politically independent of the capitalists, with its own class organisations, its own program for seizing power, its own class rhetoric, and united in a single international struggle against its own divisions. ■

Dear Newcastle's Socialists: Wake up!

Frustrations with the Left are hardly few and far between. In a small city like Newcastle, the Left is an even tinier fraction of the population, yet is more divided than in larger cities such as Sydney or Melbourne. ***Max J*** *analyses the situation and makes a direct call for socialists in Newcastle to wake up and get serious.*

It's no secret that the socialist movement is at world historic lows, both internationally and in Australia. This is despite various attempts to regroup and cohere the socialist movement into a fighting force once again (such as Socialist Alliance and the RCO). In Newcastle, you would not be blamed if you thought that socialists were functionally non-existent. This is because in spite of the on-paper existence of numerous socialist groupings in Newcastle, none of them are fighting organisations of militants in the workers movement.

Years have been spent and wasted in internecine, interpersonal disputes with political flavouring, which has done nothing but demoralise, splinter, and weaken the movement. This situation, which is endemic to the Newcastle Left, has made any prospects of united front work, between people who are meant to be comrades, impossible. The Newcastle Left in its current state is a smattering of friendship groups, cliques (known as "affinity groups"), insular activist clubs (Communist Students Collective & UoN Students 4 Palestine), and electoral fronts that are long past their expiry date (Socialist Alliance). This is unworkable.

We have to ask: who benefits from this situation? Certainly not the working class! Instead, this benefits cliques of activists who view radical politics as an edgy hobby to engage with once or twice a week, as opposed to a serious struggle for power. This hobbyist view of politics is not conducive to real action at all – in fact, it exists to do the opposite, to instead demobilise and pacify militants.

Blockade Australia carried out a commendable and brave campaign, risking their lives in an attempt to hinder the coal industry in Newcastle. However, years later, we must accept that this was a futile, individualist

Steve O'Brien, Socialist Alliance's candidate for Newcastle. Photo: Socialist Alliance FB.

campaign which failed its basic tasks, and especially failed to win the working class over to its aims (by design). With activists broken up, smashed up, demoralised and weakened, Blockade Australia has two choices: turn away from anarchistic and terroristic direct action or stay dead.

Socialist Alliance has existed in Newcastle for the better part of several decades, though they were more relevant in the early 2000s than they are now. Having tailed the Greens and Rising Tide for the last several years, Alliance in Newcastle is in no better a position in 2025 than they were in 2022. The commitment of Alliance's core members in Newcastle to the cause of socialism is respectable, but this respect is not a substitute for a principled Socialist left.

Alliance in Newcastle has fallen into much the same traps as the rest of the activists: they are sclerotic, self-centred, and believe they can succeed on their own. The last few election cycles should be proof enough that Alliance is not doing well, and its future prospects are not great unless they change their act. To Alliance, we say: sink or swim! Either comrades in Alliance abandon their arbitrary vendettas against other comrades, or they will join the long line of defeated, dead projects (such as the old DSP).

The Communist Party's Newcastle branch has undergone splits and reconstitutions over the last ten years. One such reconstitution took

place after their previous branch chair had to be removed for sexual assault. Firmly burrowed in the single-issue pro-Palestine activist circuit, for what reason does the Communist Party exist if it does not aim to fight for power? Instead, like Alliance, the Communist Party tails left-liberal activists in and around the Greens.

This is demonstrated by their electoral positions: they call for a Greens vote in the senate, so that the Greens can win "balance of power". That the *Communist Party* calls for the *Greens* to win, who in turn want *Labor* to win, demonstrates a startling lack of serious strategy. Why does the CPA exist, if the CPA doesn't want the CPA to win? The CPA may be a decaying institution, but comrades do not have to sink with the ship. We say: comrades – get serious! Full-time commitment to the single-issue activist circuit will lead the CPA and the working class down a dead-end street to nowhere.

The campus left, based at the University of Newcastle (UoN), has also hit a wall. The encampment campaign, led by the UoN Students for Palestine (not related to the Socialist Alternative-run Students 4 Palestine), failed to spur the university administration to act against connections to Israel and the military-industrial complex. Instead of connecting the struggle of students to that of the working class and building strong connections between students and workers (via solidarity with the NTEU on campus and staff struggles), the encampment sought to connect itself to the Greens-aligned activist circuit.

To this end, the encampment sought to have speakers from the Greens, such as Campbell Knox (Maitland Greens) and Mehreen Faruqi (NSW Greens), among others. The small encampment was swiftly destroyed. Of course it was: it did not make a serious attempt at winning over the broad layer of sympathetic students at the university. Instead, it alienated the broad layer of sympathetic students through disoriented social media stunts. We commend the bravery of the students who organised the encampment, suffered losses (material and otherwise), and were harassed by the administration and its goons in campus security – but they nonetheless failed in their aims and tasks.

Now, much of UoN's campus left fights a defensive battle against the administration and the student association. A defensive campaign is being waged on campus, led by a group around left-Laborist Matthew Jeffrey, who was recently removed from office as President of the Student Representative Council. This campaign demonstrates, if anything, how much of a laughable circus student politics at the university is. Instead of being committed to supporting students, the University of Newcastle Student Association (UNSA) commits itself to blowing student money on kickbacks, paychecks, and covert threats against activists. But a defensive campaign on campus which only aims to support one person is not a campaign which will win over a broad layer of students capable of winning a democratic association.

We say this not to sneer at the rest of the Left, but to give comrades the wake up call they sorely need. It is a bizarre situation when the Spartacist League, world-renowned for their allegedly sclerotic sectarianism, is more willing to engage in principled dialogue and united front work than "anti-sectarian" comrades in Socialist Alliance, etc.

The Socialist Left in Newcastle must recohere itself around a serious socialist program. That is, a program for the advancement of the workers movement, the overthrow of capitalism, and the establishment of an emancipated, self-managed society. This can only be done if comrades smash the chains that hold back unity: the sectarianism, the interpersonal squabbling, and the clique-ism. This situation is not sustainable. Many comrades and activists have been burned out or repulsed by these circumstances. This is an irreparable loss of potential militants and communist cadres.

The RCO is hardly perfect, nor would we claim to be so. However, our most positive trait is our willingness to work with comrades in spite of perceived slights and disputes. We have done so numerous times in the past: with Socialist Alternative via the Victorian Socialists, with the Spartacist League, at times with members of the Communist Party of Australia. But in Newcastle, this positive united front work is not possible, because other comrades choose to snub unity. Despite this, RCO comrades in Newcastle have done their best to critically support Socialist Alliance's electoral campaign from the outside. We've attempted to make in-roads with unaffiliated activists across Newcastle.

Only a serious regroupment of socialists will build a party capable of leading the working class away from reformism and conservatism. But in order for this to happen, comrades need to wake up and make a choice: sink or swim! ■

Bury Labor! Vote Socialist!

*Issued 23rd April 2025 by **Red Battler**, published by the **Spartacist League of Australia**.*

Albanese's tenure in The Lodge has been one of open attacks on the working class. Presiding over deteriorating living conditions, the Labor government has pushed forwards with AUKUS, cracked the skulls of Palestinian protesters and put the CFMEU into administration—one of the biggest attacks on the workers movement in generations. Albanese has spent his entire term batting for the bosses and being a most craven lackey of US imperialism. As for Dutton, he is campaigning for more of the same **and then some!**

If either have their way, this would only be the beginning. With Trump twisting the arms of American allies to shoulder ever more, Australia will need to pay increasing amounts to keep the Empire afloat and begin severing its lucrative economic lifeline with China, for which the ruling class will try and make the working class foot the bill. Already there are cries by various bourgeois pundits to "Trump proof" the economy by further cracking down on the unions while lining up the country behind the US drive for war against China. Beneath the pantomime of promises in this election, it's an Albanese-Dutton unity ticket. Whoever becomes prime minister, both promise only more misery for the working and oppressed people of Australia.

To fight this course, the workers movement in this election must say: **no vote for Labor**! Yes, we need to struggle against the Coalition. But the fight against the coming attacks can only be waged independently of, and against, Albanese's ALP, which will only turn the screws tighter and has already drawn the just ire of swathes of the working class. This anger needs to be channelled into building a working-class opposition to the incoming government. To advance this, we call on workers and the oppressed to support Socialist Alliance (SA) and Victorian Socialists (VS) in the upcoming elections as both are standing against the major parties on a pro-working-class basis.

While we have political differences with both groups, the stronger the success of these socialist campaigns against Albanese, the better position the class will be in to organise as a real force and fight back against whichever party fronts for the bosses in the coming period. A strong socialist vote would be both a kick in the teeth to the political establishment and pose a working-class alternative to it. This would be the best way to nip the budding right-wing reaction, which is already ascendant internationally. Workers are sick and tired of the rotten status quo. Either this discontent will strengthen the workers movement or it will become a reservoir of support for one of the many pretenders to the wannabe-Trump throne. If the workers movement continues to be a non-factor, the latter will become increasingly likely.

Unfortunately, working-class opposition to the ALP in this election, much like the workers movement as a whole, is weak and divided. The starkest example of this are the "left" union leaders. After allowing the CFMEU to be put under state administration without a shot being fired, union "leaders" from the CFMEU to the ETU proclaimed their commitment to "Bury Labor"—not by fighting back on the streets, but through the ballot box. Even then, if unions had responded to Labor's union-busting by forging a (genuinely) labour alternative in the coming elections, this would

have changed the terrain drastically. It could have been the basis for a larger, united working-class opposition to the ALP, able to harness the widespread discontent and demonstrate that the workers movement can be a force to be reckoned with.

Instead, these union bureaucrats spent months backpedalling. First there were murmurs of forging a new working-class party.

Graphic advertising Jordan van den Lamb's senate campaign for the Victorian Socialists. Photo: victoriansocialists.org.au

Then there were whispers about backing minor parties of various liberal stripes. After months of dangling one thing in front of another, these bureaucrats whimpered their support to the union-busting ALP lest the Coalition gets in and...busts unions. The left, who had been riding high on the bureaucrats' "Bury Labor" train, were derailed as the energy seen months ago dissipated.

The worst are those leftists who champion "lesser evilism" and call to vote Labor and/or the Greens. This is an election where layers of the proletariat, repelled by Labor's attacks, are looking for a working-class alternative. Instead of fighting for this alternative, many on the left are doing the union bureaucrats' job of dragging the working class kicking and screaming back to the Labor government that has just betrayed them, or to the Greens which misdirects this working-class anger back into the hands of the (small-l) liberals. These "socialists" have given up even trying to put up a working-class alternative this election and keep the left discredited as little more than the hangers-on of the liberal order that is fast rotting away.

Then there are SA and VS, who are running against Labor. This is a good first step, which is why we are supporting them. But it is clear that even these groups are not approaching the elections with a real battle plan against the bosses in the coming period.

SA say they "want to put forward a radical alternative to the major parties" and run a socialist election campaign in defence of the CFMEU, Palestine and against AUKUS. Good! But their whole MO has been to play nice and be chummywith Greenies and "left" union bureaucrats. This is written all over their "ecosocialist" themed campaign, designed to only be a shade redder than the Greens.

For instance, the preference policy which SA campaigns on argues to "Vote [1] for Socialist candidates then preference Greens and other progressive candidate before preferences to Labor ahead of Liberals, Nationals and other right-wing parties. This will maximise your vote and help keep Peter Dutton and his fellow Trump admirers out." In past state elections they have gone so far as to even campaign for the Greens rather than run their own candidates. This is poison to a campaign that is supposed to be a working-class alternative.

It is one thing to abide by undemocratic voting laws which force you to preference several parties, however rotten, lest your ballot be declared spoilt. It is another to hide behind these laws to promise that votes "aren't wasted" on socialists and will eventually go to these parties in a bid to "keep Dutton out." Votes to SA aren't wasted precisely because they stand in the way of Albanese and his union-busting crew. This is the only way to fight to keep out Dutton and co., against the Labor government which has long paved the way for them.

The VS campaign is cut from the same cloth. Their lead candidate, TikTok influencer purplepingers (Jordan van den Lamb), has pledged to run a socialist campaign against the major parties with a laundry list of demands to be fought for not just in parliament but on the streets. But like their strategy on the streets, VS's election strategy has been about seeking friends in the union bureaucracy and amongst other liberal elements. For example, in the seat of Calwell VS withdrew their candidate in order to not to stand against a Greens candidate. The result of this strategy is an election campaign whose demands come off as a long list of nice things to have, while dipping the tippiest of toes into more radical waters. Even the elementary call to defend the CFMEU, never a

central axis in the campaign to begin with, has fallen off the radar the closer the election approaches. This is in spite of the demand offering real inroads into a large layer of disgruntled workers.

Both of these campaigns are undermined by the fact that they have been built not on the basis of advancing a class-struggle fight against the incoming government, but at best on trying to pick up a seat or two while remaining in the good graces of Labor's union bureaucracy and the Greens. This disarms the working class's ability to advance its interests or fight for any of these demands for that matter. Both election campaigns avoid rocking the liberal boat too hard and mounting a real challenge. While their strategy may have some sway among inner-city yuppies and would-be Teals, it alienates workers who are looking for an alternative to Labor and the Greens, not a Labor/Greens-lite.

In fact, while it is good that SA and VS are running against Labor, both campaigns reflect the very fatuous optimism and myopia imbibed by the major parties. This is seen in how their demands are bereft of any roadmap as to how to actually win them (beyond activist platitudes) let alone a plan to fight back against the coming attacks on the working class. Look around! The world is approaching crisis. The American Empire is demanding ever more from its allies in preparation for a war drive against China.

To keep itself afloat, US imperialism will look to squeeze blood out of the working class from Guangzhou to Michigan. For this, Australia's ruling class is gearing up behind Trump, which will mean further militarisation, a clampdown on the unions and much more. Whether it is Albo or Dutton, the next prime minister will soon enough be Trump's little lackey.

There is a desperate need for the workers movement to wage an anti-imperialist fightback against this course. Doing so demands the most irreconcilable opposition to the "left" union leaders that have lined up behind Albanese. Waging an election campaign as a platform to advance a fight on this basis would project a real alternative and put us in a position to harness the frustration of working people in Australia for their own class interests.

There are those on the left who recognise some of the issues that plague the left this election. In their article "Election 2025: What way for the working class?" (Partisan! No. 8), the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) rightly asserts the need to vote socialist in the coming election while directing valid criticisms at the left. They correctly point out how the socialist vote in the elections is weak and divided, that the "two platforms are nearly indistinguishable, and the sectarian differences that divide the movement are totally inscrutable to the working class" adding "Practically, these platforms are not necessarily more radical than that of the Greens —albeit one has the word 'socialist' plastered above it."

All true! But the RCO solution boils down to preaching unity, declaring the necessity of a communist party, while rattling off their own list of demands to add to the platforms. Not wrong in itself, this still misses the central reason for the weak and divided nature of the left in these elections and more generally. The reason the socialist left is unable to cohere itself as a political force against Labor in the elections (or reforge a communist party for that matter) is precisely because it lacks a program for this.

Instead of looking to break the workers movement from its misleaders, left groups hang off the coattails of the "left" Laborite bureaucrats who in turn bow down to Albanese. This is the basis for their Green-lite platforms, designed to be as agreeable as possible to the union bureaucracy. Instead of fighting for this break, the RCO tries to plaster over it with red paint.

So, what to do? Despite our differences, it is imperative to fight tooth and nail for the success of SA and VS in these elections. A strong working-class vote against the incoming government can only strengthen our position for future battles. But this cannot be separated from the struggle within the anti-Labor left for a strategy that can prepare the class for these fights, which threaten to become more acute in the coming period. Socialists should put forward a fighting program that advances this perspective. We propose:

- Free Palestine!
- Defend the CFMEU!
- Smash the US-Australia alliance— Sink AUKUS, US troops/bases out of Australia!
- Reindustralise Australia—expropriate the banks to pay for it!
- Forward to a worker's republic! ■

[Editor's note:
You can find a copy of the RCO's program available at https://revcomorg.info]

Poster for the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, 1907.

The Ballot and the Street: Toward a Bolshevist electoral strategy

Elections bring out the best and the worst of the Left. ***Edith Fischer*** *gives a historical perspective on socialist electoral strategy, arguing for the socialist left in Australia to take elections seriously as contests of power.*

Considering,

That this collective appropriation can arise only from the revolutionary action of the productive class – or proletariat - organized in a distinct political party;

That a such an organization must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation…

-Karl Marx and Jules Guesde, Program of the French Workers Party, 1880

Parliamentary Cretinism and Revolutionary Abstentionism: Two Sides of the Same Coin

In his magisterial and oft-forgotten survey of the development of socialism in the French Third Republic, Karl Kautsky clearly elucidated the relationship between parliamentary cretinism and political abstention in the workers movement. Parliamentary cretinism has a long history in the French socialist movement. In 1848, one of the principal leaders of the socialists, Louis Blanc, entered into the government of the petit-bourgeois democrats, trading socialism for "petit-bourgeois illusions" in Lenin's words.

This pattern was repeated again in the 1899 Waldeck-Rousseau government, when Alexandre Millerand (who would himself go on to lead a conservative government after abandoning socialism in 1912) a member of the French Section of the Workers International (SFIO) and leader of the socialist parliamentary faction, took the post of

commerce minister. The Waldeck-Rousseau government was a government of "republican defence", and argued that all defenders of republican principles needed to form a united government to oppose clerical and monarchist reaction. This coalition included Millerand, as well as Moderate Republicans like Thiers, who had overseen the massacre of the French working class during the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871.

Millerand's entry into the Waldeck-Rousseau government was widely seen as a betrayal, and in the wake of his right-wing turn the socialist movement in France began to fragment. In the wake of this breakdown of the socialist movement, revolutionary syndicalism became increasingly popular amongst the French working class. The syndicalist movement was based in the trade unions, and was popular amongst younger, more militant workers who were alienated by the Millerandist turn in French socialism.

The syndicalists rejected political participation in favour of "direct action" - strikes, mass action tactics, and street battles with the bourgeois police. They rejected all forms of political representation, and called for a corporate state - a revolutionary state organised on the basis of industry and occupation. The growth of the syndicalists was fueled by the mighty class struggles of that period, but also by the parliamentary-cretinism of the French social democrats.

However, the syndicalist tactic led the militant sectors of the French working class into a blind alley. The syndicalists rejected systematic political struggle, and as such rejected the highest form of unity of the working class. Instead, they believed, in economistic terms, that the working class could achieve a revolutionary consciousness through direct struggle with capital.

The rejection of political struggle did not make the French syndicalists immune to opportunism. However, its form was different to the reformists in the French socialist movement. The revolutionary syndicalists never represented the majority of the working class, who had not yet come to revolutionary consciousness. This minority struggled consistently to reach the masses of workers - but they lacked a political program and systematic propaganda apparatus.

When the syndicalists were consistently politically defeated, they increasingly turned towards a populist nationalism for their base of support. Figures like Georges Sorel, a revolutionary syndicalist influenced by Marx, would begin to associate with Action Francaise (French Action), a monarchist paramilitary organisation led by Charles Maurras. In turn, Sorel would develop a synthesis of syndicalist, anarchist, and nationalist thinking as part of the Cercle Proudhon (Proudhon Circle), which would later inspire fascist thinkers like Gentile and Mussolini.

The confluences between revolutionary syndicalism and revolutionary nationalism were many - rejection of political representation, a fetish for direct action and a politics of confrontation, a belief in an organic, apolitical political model based on occupation, a cult of action, and a disdain for intellectuals. This confluence was repeated in Italy, where former Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organisers would go on to found fascist trade unions, and Benito Mussolini himself would make the short leap from the revolutionary syndicalist wing of the Italian Socialist Party to the growing revolutionary nationalist movement.

The pattern in France was repeated in different countries in different ways, and everywhere it left the same result - the working class was divided between a moderate wing, led by ministerial socialists (Millerandists) who sought coalitions with bourgeois governments in order to advance the immediate interests of workers, and a revolutionary wing which abstained from parliamentary tactics and limited itself only to the most militant tactics of the class struggle. Even in periods where revolutionary struggles break out (such as in Spain in the 1930s), the syndicalists remain a minority of the working class, and cannot win the vital political majority for socialism that is required in order to actually make a revolution. The working class is divided and defeated.

The Marxist Alternative

Between these two poles, Marx and Engels consistently intervened in favour of a revolutionary use of the electoral tactic. The working class, appearing on the political scene in the 1840s, quickly began a struggle for universal suffrage. This struggle, which served as the confluence between the radical republican tradition that emerged out of the bourgeois revolutions and the growing socialist movement, was vital to the development of a working class consciousness, and placed the working class at the centre of the struggle for democracy. This struggle, the "battle for democracy" as Marx and Engels put it, was at the centre of working class strategy. In fact, it was far more important than the daily trade

union struggles of the working class over economic questions.

Of course, universal suffrage is a necessary but insufficient condition for working class power. In the hands of the bourgeoisie, it becomes a tool for the deception of the working class. Only if the working class can organise an independent political party can they turn this tool of deception into a weapon for emancipation. The struggle for this independent party, which notably must be independent of all other class forces, including bourgeois and petit-bourgeois democrats, is the struggle to which Marx and Engels dedicated their lives. It was under the slogan of political independence that Marx and Engels, and early social democrats such as Bebel and Leibknecht, argued so consistently against the Millerandists and other parliamentary cretins. A class cannot be independent when it relies on another class for its political power. The working class must be able to take power in its own right.

This battle was carried on by Lenin, who was a consistent advocate of the electoral tactic. Even when the majority of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) were opposed to participation in the Third Tsarist Duma (parliament), Lenin argued for the consistent combination of electoral work with illegal street organisation. When the Liquidationists (a faction within the Menshevik group) sought to dissolve the party underground and abandon the struggle to overthrow the Tsar in order to seek a better electoral footing, Lenin campaigned relentlessly for their expulsion, branding them traitors. When the Otzovists (Recallists) organised within the Bolsheviks to cease all participation in the Duma and to only undertake illegal work, Lenin fiercely opposed them. Revolutionary social democracy, in Lenin's view, embraced all potential tactics - electoral organising, electoral boycotts, strikes, armed street demonstrations, partisan warfare - in the struggle for socialism. The question was when a given tactic was appropriate given the level of class struggle in a given country. Opportunistic fetishism of one tactic over another would only lead to disaster.

Between Scylla and Charybdis

Revolutionary social democracy presents a narrow path by which the working class can come to power. The working class is the subject of the communist revolution by virtue of its specific place in capitalist society. Stripped of pre-capitalist social relations, homogenised as the collective labourer and exploited by the collective capitalist, the working class is more cooperative, cosmopolitan, and social than any other class in human history.

As such, it is uniquely predisposed to political organisation and to political democracy. However, in itself, this political organisation will not take on a revolutionary character while socialism is not hegemonic in the workers movement. The working class needs to become conscious of its own role in history, and the historical task of its class - to overturn capitalist society and emancipate humanity.

In the realm of high politics, that is in the theatre of the bourgeois parliament, the working class has a unique opportunity to develop its political consciousness. Not only do electoral tactics allow for the presentation of the socialist program to the entirety of society, but it allows this program to be put on the ballot, every single election. Through this process, and through the tireless efforts of the socialist representatives, the working class will come to understand the nature of politics as the struggle between political programs, each representing the interests of social classes and class fractions. In the hands of the bourgeoisie, the electoral weapon is a tool of mass deception. In the hands of the Bolshevik, the electoral weapon is a tool of emancipation - it is used to draw the class line across all of society, and to expose the machinations and illusions of the bourgeoisie.

This strategy is not without dangers. Electoral tactics consistently expose the working class and its organisations to the risk of opportunist tendencies. These tendencies would advocate for a strategy of parliamentary cretinism - seeking alliances with the capitalist parties at the expense of the independence of the working class. This tendency is an inevitable result of electoral work. However, the same is true of consistent trade union work. The case of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) is indicative here. A revolutionary social democratic party, the SPD was eventually conquered by reformist elements. These elements had two sources - the Bavarian section of the party, and the party's trade union faction. In the latter case, trade union work gave rise to a desire to moderate the revolutionary program of the social democrats in order to appeal to more workers in trade union struggles. The daily battles for better contracts and trade union recognition give rise to a distinct reformist tendency in trade union work.

This tendency must be relentlessly combated in the working class and in the workers party. However, to abstain completely from trade union work on this basis (as some revolutionary abstentionists would advocate) would be a fatal error. So too would splitting the trade union movement into distinct, revolutionary unions. Such a tactic would isolate the most militant workers and totally relinquish the majority of workers to the leadership of state loyalists and social imperialist traitors. Abstention, in the electoral realm or in trade union work, is not the answer. The answer is political democracy, open political struggle, and a consistent communist message.

We can ascertain from the consistent work of the Bolsheviks and other revolutionary social democrats nine lessons:

1. The Communist Party must be consistently independent, and are consistent advocates for the political independence of the working class. It must reject governing coalitions with all capitalist parties, petit-bourgeois parties, and state-loyalist workers parties. The Communist Party must not form a government unless it can guarantee the implementation of its minimum program in full. This principle applies at all levels of government.
2. The Communist Party must run on a revolutionary program. This program must include a revolutionary minimum: a fully democratic republic, socialisation of key industries, and the political supremacy of the working class. This program provides the minimum basis on which the Communist Party would support a government.
3. The Communist Party and its Central Committee must consistently inspect and oversee its parliamentary faction, and assert organisational control over all of its representatives. All elected representatives must be proven cadres with a firm political education and a proven loyalty to the Party.
4. Communist representatives must be subordinate to the decisions of the Party and its Congress and Central Committee. Discipline in voting must be strictly enforced. Representatives who abdicate the party line must be severely disciplined, and those who betray the working class must be driven out of the movement.
5. Communist representatives must consistently oppose all war budgets and war machinations of the capitalists. Even when this position may temporarily place us in a minority even amongst the working class, principled opposition to all budgets of the bourgeois war machine is the only way to guarantee a principled defence of the interests of the working class.
6. Communist representatives must be integrated into both the legal and illegal work of the Party. They must be revolutionaries by trade, and be willing to undertake all work assigned by the Party. They must subordinate all electoral activity to the extra-parliamentary activity of the Party - they must be active in the organisation of strikes, of mass demonstrations, and other vital political work.
7. Communist representatives are not career politicians, nor do they exist to cultivate a career in politics. They are operators in the enemy camp. They are not legislators seeking arrangements with other legislators; they are tribunes of the class, and must ruthlessly pursue the interests of the class.
8. Communist representatives must work constantly in their districts to organise for revolution. They must give speeches and organise demonstrations, support unions and cooperatives, and develop popular assemblies. They must meet consistently with the workers and hear their views, and consistently present the communist perspective in clear terms.
9. Communist representatives do not just seek to expose the bourgeoisie - they must also expose the servants of the bourgeoisie amongst the working class. Social patriots and social imperialists, who operate in the name of the working class but in reality serve the capitalists, must be relentlessly attacked and exposed. A Communist representative only earns the title of communist when they show consistent hostility to the entire bourgeois system.

Today, few socialist or communist parties live up to these basic principles. There are very few who are willing to campaign on a consistent socialist message, with consistent socialist tactics. However, revolutionary social democracy - the tradition of Marx, Engels, Bebel, Liebknecht, and Lenin, presents a path forward. ■

MUA members block a road in April, 1998. Photo: Fairfax

Twenty-seven years since the war on the docks

In April of 1998, Patrick Stevedores threw out its unionised workforce, and the docks turned into a battleground between cops, private security, and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). In the lead up to May Day, ***Mila Volkova*** *reflects on the waterfront dispute and what lessons communists can draw from that struggle.*

It has now been 136 years since the foundation of the Second International for the Labour, Socialist, and Marxist parties. Every year, at this time, workers across the globe come out into the streets to celebrate and commemorate our long struggle against capital. May 1st is an opportunity to reflect on our long history and plan for the future. In the 1880s, they demanded an eight-hour workday and world peace. What do we demand today?

It is also the 27th anniversary of the most recent important part of our long history – the Patrick Waterfront Dispute. In April 1998, workers in the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) went on strike after the 1,400 "wharfies" were laid off by Patrick Stevedores, a shipping and dock corporation. It is important because it was the last major industrial action with solidarity strikes from other sectors, big national news attention, and picket lines and police crashing into one another – with the pickets winning.

We yearn for those days. We wish for our times to contain such heroic victories against the enemy. How can we resurrect our contemporary workers movement? If we want to find the answers to that question, we must understand the dispute. What were the strike's failures and successes? What can we emulate from now on, what can we avoid?

The Dispute

This was the situation in 1998: the Accords-era Labor party had speared the trade union movement with the pike of neoliberalism. The dispute was the first major strike since the post-Accord "bargaining model" was introduced. It had become an offence to boycott international trade, and workers could only fight isolated battles against their own employers rather than against multiple employers in an entire industry all at once. A "right-to-strike" was formally introduced alongside increasingly severe penalties for "unlawful" (anything the courts decide is too demanding) strike action. The Howard government's reforms had only made this worse.

This was part of a deliberate international effort to smash workers' power and free capital's hands to escape the borders of the nation-state. Globalisation was the big new word, and it meant unemployment,

Paired with attack dogs, private security prepares to attack workers at the Botany bay wharf. Photo: Dean Sewell.

casualisation, and the end of the welfare state. Rather than keeping workers and parents fed, benefits now only really served to keep them in a state of constant paranoia. The Soviet Union had fallen. With it went most of the organised socialist movement (including the Communist Party of Australia) and the hope of any sort of alternative system, no matter what anyone thought about it.

On the docks, the workforce had been gradually whittled down to about half of what it had been in the 1960s. Mechanisation had aimed to reduce the workforce and improve productivity, yet Australian docks were still about half as productive as the desirable international benchmark decided on by capital. As an export-economy, Australian profits rely just as much on the literal speed that docks can get goods loaded onto ships and sent off to satisfy international demand, as much as they rely on efficiently producing those goods. It is no mystery why the National Farmers Federation collaborated with Patrick Stevedores by providing much of the scab labour.

Howard was keen to smash the MUA because it would send a message to all that opposed him. 1998 was also the year of the Jabiluka blockade, which successfully stopped the plan to build a uranium mine on indigenous land. Universities regularly seized up as students protesting cuts and privatisation paralysed campuses with occupations. Australian protestors had a taste for blockade tactics, and the federal government sought a confrontation where they could dramatically crush a blockade to prove a point.

In the dead of an early April night, security hired by Patrick Stevedores assaulted docks in speedboats and armed with dogs. They forcefully removed the entire night shift, claimed they were trespassing, and waited for scabs to arrive by police-escorted armoured trucks at dawn. The MUA went on strike and formed pickets alongside members of the CFMEU, AWU, NUW, and various other sympathetic workers, students, and wives. Over the next month, pickets in Fremantle, Sydney, and Melbourne successfully held off attempts to break their line and get the docks up and running again. In Brisbane, to the frustration of many members, Labor and the ACTU demobilised the unions and the picket was broken.

Unexpectedly, the MUA took the boss to court on the charge of a conspiracy between the government and Patrick Stevedores to illegally fire the workforce. They won an injunction against the company and the court forced the parties to negotiate. This was something the boss usually did. According to the reports, the warfies sang union songs non-stop until the end of their first shift back on the docks.

The results: half of the 1,400 sacked workers kept their jobs (with the 700 redundancies paid for by the federal government rather than the company), the MUA lost the right to enforce a union shop on the docks, the dock workers lost overtime rights, and the MUA was forced to withdraw the conspiracy case. Is this what success looks like?

The union claimed a victory and those that kept their jobs celebrated. The MUA keeps a documentary of the dispute prominently displayed on their website, with glowing praise for the last successful major strike in Australia. But the fight had been tough. Many workers had lost their marriages to the stress, lost their livelihoods when they were sacked, or simply lost their lives out of grief-stricken suicide.

Assessing the Strike

There would be no purpose to self-congratulation here. We must be frank when we declare that the dispute was a failure and not a small one. There was a world where the MUA could have won a total victory over the bosses. To accept the dismal results of the dispute would mean accepting that total victory of the bosses is natural – that it is inherently more likely than the victory of the workers. But there is nothing natural about capital's control over us.

Looking back, it is obvious that solidarity from other unions was key to getting the MUA what little victory they achieved. There were points where it was impossible to maintain the pickets otherwise. But it is a common conclusion that cross-sectoral solidarity from other unions is key to winning big industrial actions. We must recognise that even these acts of solidarity were limited and uneven. While some unions formally stopped work to join the pickets, many solidarity strikers did not have the support of their union leaders, and much of the support came from members of the community. Only thirty years prior, unions were organising general strikes across the entire country in solidarity with one another. It is the legislative framework of "bargaining" that bans such strike action.

The union attempted to wield this legislative framework against the bosses – with the results only confirming that the purpose of this system is to crush workers under its sheer weight. Prior to the raid by Patrick Stevedores security in early April, the company had gone through a restructuring that created a "labour-hire company" which held all the contracts of the workers. This allowed Patrick Stevedores to terminate all its employment contracts without formally sacking anyone. Because this bogus labour-hire company (really an arm of Patrick Stevedores) then went bankrupt, the courts were literally unable to order Patrick Stevedores to take back all 1,400 staff. It was impossible for the MUA to win a total victory through the courts.

Reports released after the dispute have revealed that this was a deliberate strategy of the company and the federal government. They were aware that firing all 1,400 workers was illegal, but that isn't what they wanted. Their plan was to draw the MUA into a legally enforced bargaining process where they could get what they really wanted: a modest reduction in the workforce and an end to MUA control over the labour hire process. This allowed them to introduce cheap non-union labour and impose productivity requirements on the workforce, reducing the cost to Australian capital of importing and exporting commodities.

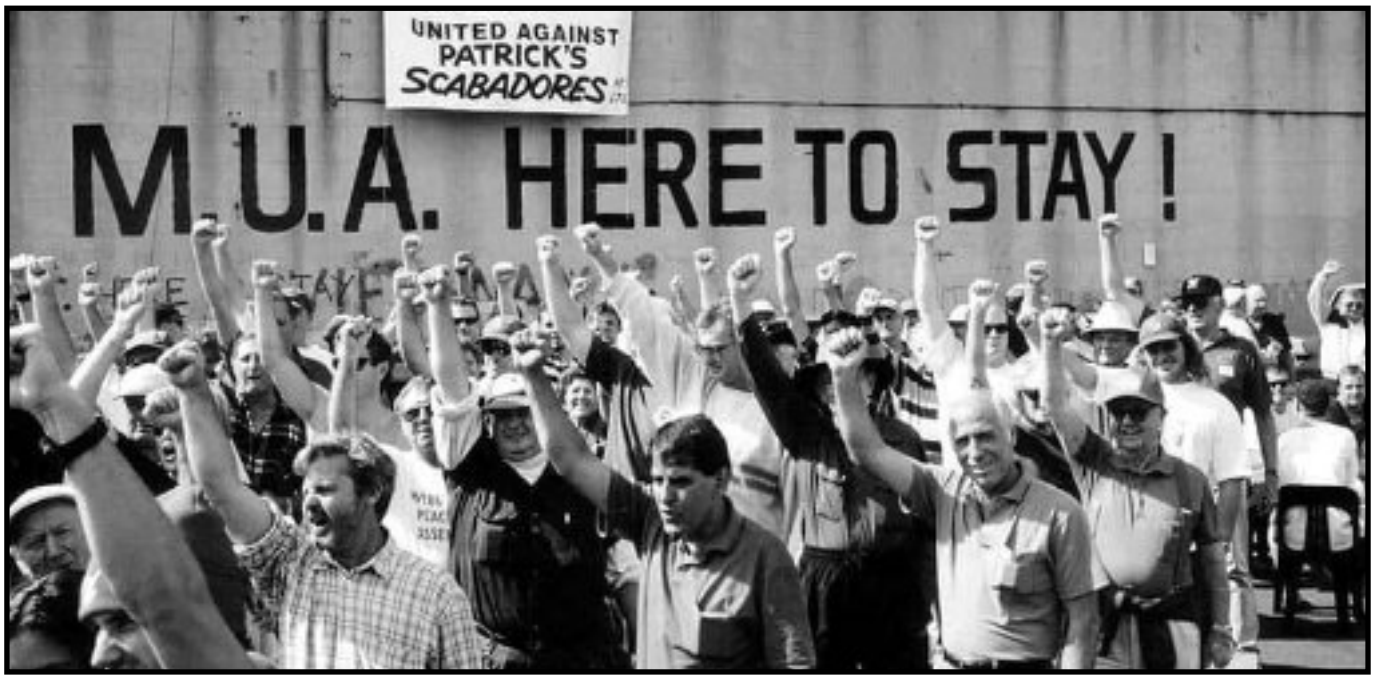
If workers want to get serious about winning, winning big, and winning totally over the bosses – we need to get straight with the fact that the legal bargaining framework is in our way. Legality is not our friend – it is a series of carrots and sticks structured to punish serious union militancy. Its use for capital is that our union leadership has become completely implicated in this process of incentives. Our leadership act more as cops for the bosses than as delegates for our interests, they never imagine taking serious (illegal) strike action. If we want to win, we must imagine it. One day soon we will have to face the unavoidable truth that real success will only happen if we defeat police in a serious picket line, deal with frozen or fined union budgets, and cope with our organisers getting thrown in jail.

We must remind ourselves who created the bargaining framework: the Labor Party. While the Coalition has refined the system over decades, they were unable to implement it when called on to do so in the 1980s. It was Labor, with its control over the union movement via the ACTU, that did capital's grubby work. Even in opposition, as they were during the dispute, they flip-flopped between vaguely sympathetic inaction (the federal party), deliberately undermining the pickets (Queensland party), and support alongside mediation (Melbourne and Sydney). But when they are in power, it is always they that do the important work that the Coalition cannot do from outside the house. When the factory wheels need greasing from hands that know its rhythms personally, it is Labor that picks up the phone. Rank-and-file party members, union members, and voters are betrayed constantly – the be-suited backs of party politicians, careerists, and union bureaucrats always turned on them. We must keep the Accords in mind. We must keep the recent annihilation of the CFMEU in mind. Labor are agents of the enemy in our camp.

Going Forward

But let's be clear, the structural forces that led to the MUA strike are not just fictions made up by capital to trick us into accepting its will. Inflation in Australia was rampant, profits were too low, and productivity was not internationally competitive. A general strike of many Australian workers may have won a total victory in the dispute, but capital's voracious need to expand asserts itself ruthlessly on everyone. It would only have been a matter of time before this iron law of accumulation reared its head again and clawed and gnashed its way out of high wages in Australia to low wages elsewhere.

On May Day, it's important to remind ourselves that we are just one national section of an international class connected to one another through our socialised labour. This is not a philosophical point, but an objective



MUA members rally during the Patrick Waterfront Dispute. Photo: ACTU Institute

reality that our labour is more connected than ever before. The structural forces of globalisation are international in scale and, if we want to win, we must organise ourselves on an international basis. Even then, we cannot overcome these forces through sheer determination and never-ending strikes. We must take political power and seize control of these forces directly – slay them rather than tire them out in a boxing match we don't have enough rounds left to win.

But leaping from our current conditions to an imagined international proletarian revolution isn't any good. We must face our concrete contemporary conditions. Reflecting on the dispute, and the 27 years after it, we find two important tasks that we need to achieve today:

- Abolishing the legal mechanisms of union bargaining and arbitration. We need to free our hands to strike on the largest scale possible. We need full control of our strike budgets without the risk of government confiscation.
- Split from the Labor party. We need a socialist workers party, not a capitalist one. We need independent trade unions controlled by rank-and-file members and led by socialist agitators rather than Labor bureaucrats.

How do we get from where we are now to where we need to be to achieve these? We are in a paradox – to achieve these tasks we need a militant union movement, but to resurrect a militant union movement we need to achieve these tasks.

We need something resembling a party. Not an actual party, because that can't exist in a meaningful way until after the workers movement's heart is beating again. But nonetheless, it is basically impossible to go about defibrillating the trade unions without a socialist movement that is united, rather than divided into squabbling sects. In the dispute, socialists were a marginal force, and it showed in the misplaced faith of the rank-and-file in the Labor-aligned union leadership. Union delegates were often the primary force pushing for a general strike, but they were unable to shift the views of their members. Without the organisation and discipline of a vanguard party, they could not unseat their complacent leaders.

Our strategy needs to shift too. The past thirty years of a-political "rank-and-file" so-called "base building" organising by socialists has failed – the union movement has only continued to decline. In the era of de-industrialisation, financialisation, and complete capital mobility it is increasingly impossible to properly win union demands without calling for state intervention. Economic demands are no longer enough when achieving even that requires a political vision. The trade unions must be politicised, transformed from ailing economic apparatuses to genuine organs of struggle. Only an organised vanguard, which unites the sects, and which agitates in favour of economic demands for openly political reasons, can do this.

If we do all that, we might just have a revolution in our lifetimes. ■

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Independent MP Zali Steggall in 2022. Photo: reneweconomy.com.au

What about the Teals?

Since 2022, a new bloc of independents, called Teals, have cropped up. They aim to win over disaffected voters from the Labor and Liberal parties to an environmentally conscious, but nonetheless conservative, platform. ***Porco*** *writes about the Teal phenomenon and how communists should relate to it.*

The 2022 election was lost by the Liberal party. Labor narrowly gained a majority, but the real surprise was the seats that the Liberals lost to independents and even the Greens. The Liberals lost three seats to the Greens in Queensland, and across the country another 5 seats to independents. The Liberals under Morrison had been repudiated by a bunch of independents funded by the NGO Climate 200, a political funding organisation started by the heir of Australia's first billionaire.

Most of the independents that won in 2022 have been referred to as "Teals". This is an allusion to them being in between the Blue of the Liberal party, and the Greens. This group of independents is not homogenous, nor are they an actual party, but they often function as a sort of oppositional bloc to the two major parties, if only because it benefits their public profiles to maintain a certain independence from either side of the parliament.

The Teals consist of seven MPs, with Zali Steggall considered to be the first. She is an Alpine-skier-turned-lawyer who defeated Tony Abbot in the seat of Warringah in 2019. Warringah had been a safe liberal seat since its formation in 1922, so Steggall's win over the former Prime Minister was seen as a shift in the attitudes of some Liberal voters. Steggall won 44% of the vote in 2022.

Steggall in many ways is the prototypical Teal. She opposed Bill Shorten's franking credits policy and has modeled herself as a "supporter of small business". But for most Teals, climate change and renewables are the main edge they have over the liberals.

The other six Teals are; Monique Ryan, Allegra Spender, Kylea Tink, Sophie Scamps, Zoe Daniel and Kate Chaney. There are another thirty independents who could be considered Teals in the sense that they are funded by the "Climate 200" fundraising group, and are usually challenging Liberal seats. The Teals who won in 2022 were challenging moderate Liberals in wealthy urban areas. They campaigned around the idea that the moderates had no influence on the Morrison government.

The Teals represent an anxious suburban liberalism. These wealthy professional voters in electorates like Kooyong and Warringah want more women in parliament, and less climate change denial, yet still maintain a conservative perspective around housing, tax, and Australia's economic policy in general. Most Teals centre "economic growth" to be fundamental to the green transition on their websites.

However there is also a narrative that they're purely disaffected Liberal voters. This is not true. The average Teal voter was either a Labor or Greens voter before voting for Teals. Only 18% of Teals voters were previously Liberal voters. The Teal vote is a tactical vote from wealthier left liberals, against the Liberal moderate in their electorate.

Nevertheless they do need this bloc of moderate Liberal voters dissenting to attain electoral success. Monique Ryan is a perfect example of this phenomena. In 2022, her vote share was over 40%, and while Josh Frydenberg lost 6.5%, the Labor Party candidate lost 10.6% and the Greens lost 14.8%.

Another feature of "Teal" politics, or more accurately the politics of Climate 200, is the focus on getting women into politics. Climate 200 refers to supporting candidates who are "advancing respect and safety for women."

It remains to be seen whether the Teals, or

other independents will make more ground this election. If they do, it will show that many voters in these richer areas are still anxious about climate change and think independents are the politically pragmatic solution. Australians in these electorates want more climate action, but also lower taxes. It seems quite possible that the Teals will expand in the coming years. They may not be a political force that can just be ignored.

This means the parliament, and the two party system that has remained relatively consistent since the 1950s is being called into question. Between 1940 and 1990, no independents were elected to parliament. This post war electoral supremacy from the major parties is breaking down dramatically. If properly taken advantage of, communists may have an opening in the next decade to form their own party for the working class. We should be aiming to split the base of the Labor party and the Greens, and eventually even win the lower strata of Teal and Liberal voters to a socialist platform.

The phenomena of independents is here to stay. They provide the sense of a wider array of choices to nervous professionals and small business owners in the wealthy suburbs around Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. But they don't indicate much else. People in these electorates are worried about climate change, and increasingly frustrated with the Coalition's reluctance to touch the issue, if not actively deny it.

If the Teals continue to expand, the Coalition will be facing a crisis of legitimacy among its base. But what comes next will not be any less pro-business. We cannot wait for slow electoral shifts that arise from the protest votes of a metropolitan ruling class. A socialist party should be building itself up right now while the cracks in the electoral system are beginning to show. Our current socialist movement is still caught up in the debates of yesterday. Only a reunified party project will help us find the right path.

Australia's climate predicament cannot be dealt with by an assortment of oppositional independents who exist purely to wedge the major parties. Only a radical, mass workers movement can begin to unwrap the environmental problem that Australian capitalism has created for the workers on this continent. The voter base of the Teals are the last demographic likely to vote for a socialist party, let alone join one. Why would they? They have the Teals. ■

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Three thoughts on Partyism

Marxism Fringe saw comrades coming together for discussions and debates about Marxism and Marxist strategy. ***Revmira*** *clarifies questions around the RCO's strategy and Partyist politics.*

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation recently hosted an event called Marxism Fringe, a trio of talks held the day after Socialist Alternative's Marxism conference. I hosted one of the talks, Towards a History of Partyism, a discussion on the historical roots of the tendency that the RCO defends and operates within. The debate afterwards included the question: how does the RCO and the partyist tradition ensure that the right-wing and reformist elements in the party don't betray the working class? The answer I gave of 'we don't know' was unsatisfactory, but also wrong.

The debate also exposed many of the political ideas that the sectarian left has internalised when debating with or engaging the RCO. This is partly due to a refusal to engage honestly with other sects on a mass theoretical level. Yet in turn, the RCO always bears part of the blame for our lack of reply or attempts to engage with the sects honestly.

On the question of the minimum program

The defence of the minimum-maximum program is often seen as an easy goal by many sects who fall under the Trotskyist umbrella. Their conception of the minimum program falls within the Trotskyist myth that Steve Masthead, WW1518.

Bloom describes as such "*that the coming Russian revolution would be limited to the establishment of a bourgeois-democratic republic, and that a "minimum program" was therefore needed to develop the demands working people would make on such a republic*". Their conception of a minimum program and ours are so far apart that we end up talking past each other. This resulted in the argument that The Road to Workers' Power was a program putting forward piecemeal reforms, rather than a revolutionary document putting forward the bare minimum required for working class power.

The demands put forward in any one section is not necessarily revolutionary on their own, but when taken together it reflects a direct assault on capital. Furthermore, The Road to Workers Power must be understood as two things; it is the factional proposal of the Partyist faction of the communist movement, and it is a 'Draft Program for a Communist Party in Australia'. Engagement, debate, polemics, the struggle for unity in action and words - all of these are vital, and will fundamentally shift the positions held as the fight for the communist party emerges and deepens. This is the dialectic of class struggle. The program is not some invariant document handed down from upon high.

The question of the right and reformists

The opening of Luca Traven's review of Zombie Kautskyism is a great example of missing the point entirely with the Partyist perspective on classical social democracy. On a practical level, the article, much like Red Spark's increasingly long review of the same book, functions as a covert polemic against the

RCO. This is because most sects utterly despise engaging with other sects because that requires acknowledging their theory as a potentially valid counter view.

The article claims that "*common to these contributions is an attempt to rehabilitate Kautsky and historiographically reverse the rift which defined his era – the painful schism between revolutionaries and reformists that took place during the First World War*". From this remarkably succinct claim emerges the argument that the RCO stands for the same kind of unity as the SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany): unity with traitors.

This claim is wrong. The Partyist tradition has always understood itself as an offspring of the Bolshevik or Leninist tradition. This can be seen in its origins in The Leninist, which waged a factional struggle against the very kinds of liquidationism the RCO is accused of supporting. Nonetheless, our engagement with the Marxism of the Second International and defence of the orthodox (and so far, the only successful) strategy of Marxism means that we are painted as defenders of the monstrous traitors that 'Leninist' faux-history has warped them to be.

Socialist Alternative's positions reflect what Mike MacNair calls the negative critique of the left tendency within the Second International: "*that the method of electoral struggle and coalitions - or even the effort to build permanent mass workers' organisations, as opposed to ad hoc organisations of mass struggle like strike committees - necessarily led to the corruption of the workers' representatives and organisations and the evolution of these organisations into mere forms of capitalist control of the working class*". The immediate counterpoint, particularly within the framework of the philosophy of Socialist Alternative, is that the state capitalist Soviet Union was even worse than capital.

The Right, as MacNair has pointed out, will always have material, and political advantages over the left. Their classical position within union leadership and parliament gives them connections to the state, financial advantages and the capacity to be more active in intra-party debates. Humphrey McQueen points out in A New Britannia when discussing the Labor Party that "*the expense involved in travel and loss of work meant that conferences, especially those in the federal sphere and the larger states were dominated by politicians*"

Whilst advances in transport and information technology has weakened the dominance of politicians in this arena, the problem remains.

Indeed, in many ways that is a core part of the fight against capital. The forces that we build to negate capital, if not constantly ensured to be under total democratic control and communist discipline, get integrated into it. It's not something that can be dealt with through lines in a program, only through the mass struggle of the working class. The Soviet Union itself represents this dialectic in practise formed as a revolutionary step into capital. The isolation and lack of economic development that dominated the new Union forced it to integrate into the world capitalist system. This culminated in the USSR negating its own purpose, and in turn its own existence.

The SPD is a perfect example of this dialectic in action, which Socialist Alternative recognises even if not in those words. Part of the counter to this position emerged from the new Bolshevik-style parties of the Comintern (Third International/Communist International), in the form of democratic centralism and the total subordination of the parliamentary faction to the party apparatus. This apparatus in turn was totally subordinated to the currently existing leadership, one which constantly reproduces itself through the formation of self-appointed slates.

In counter to this, the positions put forward by the RCO are more democratic. From *The Road to Workers Power*:

"*In bourgeois parliaments, communist representatives serve as tribunes of the people, engage in systematic agitation, and combine legal with illegal work. All parliamentary factions should be systematically bound to and controlled by the party and its elected leadership, and be drawn from proven and loyal communists. As such, parliamentary representatives will subordinate all parliamentary activity to the extra-parliamentary activity of the party, and combine legal and illegal work consistently.*"

As laid out above, all parliamentary representatives are bound to vote in line with the minimum demands put forward within the program. Any action which goes against the program or democratic decision of the party is breaking discipline, and one would assume for the parliamentary faction would be enough for immediate expulsion. One suggestion that I am partial to is upon election, every party representative signs both their letter of resignation from the party and from parliament which is placed in the hands of the

The South Coast Communist Party of Australia branch marhces. Photo: Red Flag

leadership who, if needed, simply date the letters and produce them.

Within the unions, a strategy of mass militant minorities, and a class struggle strategy for the broader union movement rather than a constant run for bureaucratic leadership, will mitigate part of the dangers.

The road to a renewed communist party, and the road to the Australian revolution, runs over the Greens, and through a split Labor. The vanguard of the class will be united, the middling must be won over, and the backwards layer isolated. This will be done through mass education and organisation on a democratic basis. This may go against Socialist Alternative's strategy and conception of revolution, with a vague spontaneity rejecting the crucial work of long term organising and education required for a cadre left, rather than the activist left. It's a model far more open to abuse by the right than a principled democratic organisation schooled in the history of class struggle, and the necessity of communism.

The myth of paper unity

Finally, I wish to discuss the argument that our position of unity around acceptance of the program as a basis for common unity rather than agreement creates the idea that we are simply fighting for paper thin unity of bare minimum agreements. We are not.

The argument that the Spartacist League of Australia (SLA) put forward in Red Battler no.1 was that "It [the RCO] believes that by sharing maximalist rhetoric and a lowest common denominator program, the left can unsplinter itself, and from there a revolutionary party can sprout"6. This argument is a common one that our basis for unity is too broad and will simply lead to us tearing apart, often Socialist Alliance is touted as an example of the natural end result of our strategy, but that is based on a misunderstanding on our concept of unity. Yes, comrades have the right to join the RCO and form a permanent faction based on ideological grounds, but unity cannot be paper thin and based on ignoring differences, nor can it be based on unanimity of opinion. The Second and Third Internationals during their revolutionary periods had constant polemics much harsher than many of the ones floating around today, yet they were able to work together. Our position is much the same. ■

The Revolutionary Role of Worker Correspondents

First published in 1924 as a pamphlet in the 'Little Red Library' series, ***William F. Dunne*** *writes on the importance of 'worker correspondents' - revolutionary journalists reporting on the workers movement.*

Worker correspondents differ from professional journalists in that they are part of the labor and revolutionary movement and fight actively in the struggles of which they write. The wider the activity of a worker correspondent in the class struggle, the greater will be the field covered by his reports. At first the worker correspondent will find it hard to gather material. As a worker, ordinary, daily events of development of the class struggle are familiar to him. He expects these. things as the routine of working class life and sees no news value in them.

It is this outlook of the worker that makes it hard for him to write or speak. He is not inarticulate because of lack of words, but because he has been taught by capitalism to look upon the thousand and one tyrannies, inconveniences and hardships inflicted on the workers as of little importance–things to be endured without comment or complaint.

The countless risks of industry, the accidents to and deaths of workers, even great disasters taking a huge toll of working class lives, quite often cause less excitement among the workers than among the liberal middle class.

Why is this? Because among the workers, deaths and accidents are common things to be expected as part of the price paid for being allowed to work. This is the idea drilled into the mass mind by capitalists and especially by capitalist journalism. The death of the wealthy idler will get the first page and a streamer headline, but the death of a worker is either not mentioned at all or given a half dozen lines.

Journalism is recording and expressing opinion on contemporary events. Journalism, like everything else in capitalist society, is a class enterprise. Journalism is the day by day listing of the facts of industry and politics and an analysis of those facts. Journalism is therefore a class affair just the same as politics, industry, art and education.

The ruling class puts its stamp on journalism just as it stamps every other form of social activity. It can even be said that more than in any other from of social expression are the class lines apparent in journalism.

Not only does the clearly class character of the capitalist press become obvious to the class conscious worker, but the most casual observation shows that every division and sub-division of the social organism has its journalistic expression.

The capitalist press itself shades off into innumerable organs of separate groups–employers' and bankers' associations, trade associations, clubs, special organizations for suppression of the workers, all have their own publications. The middle class has countless journals which cater to and express the opinions of some particular group.

Church newspapers and magazines are legion. In addition to these journals speaking openly, for some vested interest, there are the special propaganda organs of the ruling class–each with its own field. All of these journals are anti-working class in character–some of them frankly so, some of them thinly disguised with the veil of humanitarianism, and "social welfare."

Then there are the official organs of the trade union movement and its various sections and affiliated bodies–formally opposing the capitalist but actually ruled by the ethics and swayed by the prejudices of capitalism. The trade union press of the United States is not a labor press (with a few negligible exceptions). It is in reality an aid to capitalism with its warfare on the communist Party, its espousal of imperialism, its catering to ignorant prejudices, its imitation of capitalist journalism and its middle class doctrine of "equality of opportunity and identity of interest."

The Socialist press joins with the official trade union press, apologizing for capitalism, praising its parliamentary system and fighting the Communist Party as well as every revolutionary tendency in the working class movement. There remains the Communist press and it is for the Communist press we organize and train worker correspondents.

The Communist press, like the Communist Party for which it speaks, stands forth as the only clear challenge to the capitalist press and the capitalist class. The Communist Party is the most intelligent, resolute and disciplined section of the working class. The Communist

press is the most militant of all the labor press. To the Communist press the workers and the working class are always right. It never apologizes for the working class or attempts to reconcile the class conflict. Instead it seeks to encourage and broaden it.

The worker correspondents of the Communist press therefore are not mere observers and reporters of the workers' struggles. Their stories must not only reflect the life and battles of the working class, but shape their lives and struggles. They are not only the pulse of the movement, but the heart as well.

Worker correspondents of the Communist press are not only mirrors in which the class conflicts are reflected, but hammers by whose blows these conflicts are welded into one battle line. Their writings must build "The iron battalions of the proletariat."

Tireless energy is needed by worker correspondents. They secure their information while engaged in the tasks that capitalism allots them. Their stories for the most part are written after the day's toil when both body and mind are tired. Often they must make special journeys to get additional facts.

But they can and should write with the hot breath of the struggle still upon them. Sometimes it will seem to them that they are writing with their own blood.

But they will learn and they will teach the working class that no matter how small a thing it is, if it happens to or affects the workers, it is important.

The first task of worker correspondents is to see every event from the class angle and to make the workers for whom they write view it the same way. Class pride is the essence of revolutionary journalism and class pride should shine from every word and line that a worker correspondent writes.

Once more! NOTHING THAT HAPPENS TO THE WORKERS IS UNIMPORTANT.

The capitalist class and capitalist journalists pay little attention to the daily tyrannies inflicted on the workers. When these things are noticed, it is only to apologize for, or to justify them. The leaders and social traitors think that only certain things are important, but Communists know better. It is by paying attention to all the ordinary woes of the working class that Communist journalism demonstrates its class character.

It is only in the Communist press that the workers find a knowledge of their smallest grievances, understanding of the causes of these grievances and the connection of them with their struggles as a class.

The capitalist class rules because it is able to divide the workers and break up their struggles into isolated conflicts. Worker correspondents for the Communist press in every industrial center, in the factories and shops, in unions and fraternal organizations, in rural communities, wherever there are workers, link up these isolated conflicts and give to the working class a correct picture of the world ruled by capitalism because the working class is fighting not as a class, but as individuals and groups.

The Communist press becomes a mass organ reflecting and molding the struggles of the workers in the same proportion that these struggles are recorded and correctly interpreted by worker correspondents–correspondents who write of the battles of their class as a soldier writes of the battles which he helps to fight. Worker correspondents are WAR correspondents—they tell of the class war in its every sector and salient.

An army of worker correspondents means a powerful Communist press.

A powerful Communist press means a powerful Communist Party.

A powerful Communist Party means the Dictatorship of the Working Class–VICTORY FOR THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION.

"Without a Communist press," said the Second Congress of the C.I., "the preparation for the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible."

We can say, by virtue of the experience gained in our struggles since that time, that without worker correspondents a Communist press is impossible. ■

Support independent communist journalism, share *Partisan* with friends and coworkers!

Megachurch Socialism at Marxism 2025

Billed as the biggest conference of anticapitalist ideas in Australia, Socialist Alternative's Marxism 2025 brings hundreds of people together to discuss Socialist Alternative's conception of socialism and Marxism. ***Porco*** *reports on their experience attending the conference, and how it demonstrates major flaws in Socialist Alternative's "megachurch socialism".*

Socialist Alternative's MARXISM 2025 is advertised as "the biggest socialist conference in Australia". It was an endearing spectacle to see more than five hundred people who identify with the idea of "revolutionary socialism" sharing meals, discussing politics over coffee, going on adventures into Melbourne's CBD and traveling around the country for this event.

There was an admirable level of organisation, and tight scheduling surrounding the event. SAlt has been doing this for years now. They run a tight ship. The sessions were always on time, and I never noticed massive technical issues. The conference ran as smoothly as you could want it to.

But engaging with a conference about socialism requires engaging with its content. For the sessions I attended, the content was disappointing. I have not engaged with Socialist Alternative for almost seven years. Returning to their forum-style of political education this year did not leave me with any sense their political style had developed much. At least, it hadn't on the beginner sessions I attended. I didn't attend "higher" level discussions, partially because I needed to get a sense of the historiography Socialist Alternative presents to newcomers. An organisation can be judged on how it treats its new recruits. So I attended the selection of classes entitled "Marxism and the Party".

In the first session, "Marx and the working class party", we were bombarded primarily with the idea that "Marx was not an intellectual! He was a revolutionary". This is a strange conception of Marx, given that he was very clear that revolutionary theory, published for the consumption of the masses, was an inherently revolutionary act.

Stalinism vs Trotskyism at MARXISM 2025. Photo: Porco

This rejection of "being a mere theorist" is in line with the long history of anti-intellectualism within the Cliffite tradition (Tony Cliff used to implore SWP members to intentionally fail their university degrees). If Marx was just an intellectual, regardless of the nature of his revolutionary theory, he would have to be condemned like all the passive "theorists" and "armchair activists" that Socialist Alternative members often feel the need to decry.

It was not worth mentioning in this talk that Bakunin often goaded Marx for this very reason. Bakunin would not let Marx forget that he did not fight on the barricades in 1848 when they worked together in the International Workingmen's Association.

The second session I attended was "Lenin and the vanguard party". This session's main focus was the idea that the Bolsheviks were a tiny organisation, and had only Lenin's prophetic understanding of the nature of revolutionary vanguardism to persist through decades of repression and struggle. While it is true that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were ruthlessly repressed in Russia (Lenin being forced to flee and remain in exile), this framing was clearly meant to draw a parallel between the Bosheviks and Socialist Alternative.

Lenin consistently argued that the Bolsheviks were a revolutionary faction of the RSDLP. Even in 1917 the Bolsheviks welcomed a Menshevik Internationalist, Iurii Larinm to the 6th Party Congress. Bukharin said of Larin

after finishing his speech:

"I greet with special warmth his declaration about the necessity of a break with the defencists, that ulcer that is eating into not only the party, but all the democratic forces of the country. In order to combat this ulcer, it is necessary to unite all social democrat internationalists. In this hall there is not a single individual that does not feel the necessity of uniting all the living forces of social democracy."

The narrative that Lenin came from somehow outside of the socialist movement to rid it of reformists and opportunists was clear in this session. It seemed to rub against the fact that we had another session later where we discussed the Victorian Socialists, a "socialist party" with a reformist platform less radical than that of the SPD in the 1900s.

These contradictions and historical inadequacies were never acknowledged publicly, and in private would either be totally ignored or explained as "simplifying for the audience". Socialist Alternative presenters and leadership don't hold the general attendance of their conference in high regard. This is unfortunate since most of the attendance is the membership of the organisation.

An organisation that views its members as ignoramuses who must prove themselves in organising and theoretical discourse does not bode well for an organisation planning to rebuild a mass workers party. The last session I attended on this topic was "Luxembourg: a libertarian alternative to Lenin?". The presenter recounted a fairytale, where Rosa and Lenin, despite having some disagreements, were basically the same kind of revolutionaries as Socialist Alternative members, with Rosa being a little too spontaneous for her own good. Her gruesome death was totally minimised, and her critique of reformism was conveyed as a transhistorical critique, an almost spiritual conflict between the salvation of revolutionary politics and the metaphysical sin of reformism.

It was not mentioned that Luxembourg lived in a context where the SPD actually controlled a plurality of the seats in the Reichstag. While anti-capitalist reformism is still a naive delusion of many Social Democrats and left Liberals, the critique Luxembourg and Lenin were making in 1914 was far more concrete than our critique today. It was a critique of a socialist movement that had millions of members across multiple countries in Europe, and where the European powers were gearing up for what would become the first world war.

I was disappointed in the discussion that took place, so I decided to speak to the presenter afterwards. I pointed out that millions of people were socialists in the early 20th century, that these factions were much larger than we like to admit, and that Luxembourg and Lenin understood themselves not to be separate from social democracy but rather the truest representatives of that political tradition.

I was told by an older SAlt member something to the effect of "when you only have 30 minutes to present, and your audience is not very knowledgeable, you have to make difficult choices about what you dwell on." I thought this was a nicer way of saying "our audience won't care whether we tell them the truth or not."

My criticisms of these sessions are not just issues with the way Socialist Alternative understands the history of socialism. We all have our own conceptions of what happened, what went wrong, what did and didn't work. My issue is that when these narratives are taken together, they create an eschatological story that places Socialist Alternative at the centre of a world historical battle for socialism.

Socialism is equated with human dignity, the abolition of all alienation and suffering, and a heavenly future world where no one ever needs to want. And SAlt will be the cadre that is ready to receive the Australian workers when their confidence has developed and they are in the midst of a revolutionary upsurge.

This is not scientific socialism, though the phrase was used once or twice in the conference. This is megachurch socialism. It is a cute activity for a certain kind of first year university student, and a practice in being a propagandist for the more long-term organisers. If you speak to some of the leadership of SAlt, they will concede that this conference, and SAlt as an organisation, is not the revolutionary party, nor is it the ideal organisational form. So why does that come across so strongly during the sessions?

Coming into the opening night, I had no idea what we were about to witness in the cinema downstairs. I sat down and had to explain "partyism" to two SAlt people who were trying to recruit me. Suddenly the lights dimmed. We all quietened down. A movie came on the big screen that showed Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and some other archons of that decrepit imperialist state known as the USA.

Albanese and Dutton were also beamed into the brains of everyone in attendance. As this began, people started booing, hooting, declaring "shame" and sighing and huffing. I

was surprised by the collective grief session we all were participating in. Interspersed between the decaying masks of the capitalist world order were videos of migrants in cages, buildings bombed in Gaza, and fascists riots. The world was ending and we would condemn it for it's inadequacy.

But then the screen cut to black. The word "RESISTANCE" appeared. Videos of pro-Palestine protesters amd speeches by Socialist Alternative members intercut between video of massive rallies in the US, Europe, the Middle East and everywhere else came through at a dizzying pace. People began to cheer. If I was being honest, I picked the vibe of the entire conference from that moment. We were here to consume socialism. Not build it. That would have to be left to the workers councils at an undetermined moment in the future.

MARXISM 2025 suffers from a trap all too common in the modern capitalist economy. Socialist Alternative has successfully marketed a commodity that is easily digestible and non-invasive, while being mildly entertaining and informative. It is a Marxism that has learned all the right lessons from modern mass media, marketing, televangelism and social media trends. And of course, this kind of megachurch socialism needs its original sin.

The last session I attended was called "Stalinism and its impact". Stalin is of course the great villain of Trotskyism, so it felt necessary to see how a Trotskyist sect understood this villain in 2025. Basically, Stalinism was reduced to two aspects; the rank and file Bolsheviks and radical working class who could've stopped Stalin died in the civil war.

Secondly, the professionals, the military establishment, the terrible middle class, were waiting for the chance to become Bolshevik apparatchiks and take over the USSR. Stalin allowed this to happen because he was a cynical authoritarian who wanted to consolidate power. It was not mentioned that he had been organising in the RSDLP for most of his entire adult life.

A phenomenal slide was used at one point that made me think of the narrative presented in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: where mytho-historic narratives are weaponised by a cynical state to win over the support of the people it rules (Big Brother vs Emmanuel Goldstein). However, Socialist Alternative is no Big Brother. They instead present themselves as a kind of Goldsteinist insurgency.

I have heard the many smears and slanders of Socialist Alternative. I heard them from two frustrated students who I interacted with in a totally unpolitical context during the week I was in Melbourne. But I don't agree with most of the hysteria around Socialist Alternative. They are not a cult. They are far less interesting. They are an organisation that has admirably marketed socialism through a period in Australia when the concept was quite difficult to maintain an audience for. But at what cost? This period is ending and Socialist Alternative are clearly thinking about new ways to expand their political strategy. I think Victorian Socialists is a great development.

But if socialists in Australia ever want to have broad appeal, they will need to learn to work together. Factions are not parties, intellectuals are not evil. Reformists will exist in any mass workers organisation and must be combated through debate and democracy. They must be fought with politics, not through dogmatic lectures on the psychic danger of thinking reformist thoughts.

I left the conference feeling disappointed. I didn't really learn anything except that there are a lot of university students that lap this stuff up. The RCO's "Marxism Fringe" was the next day, and it felt like a small development to the institution of the MARXISM conference, by hosting a dissenting conference after Socialist Alternative's megachurch socialism.

I hope that we can develop a productive discourse with SAlt members who are willing to attend. The RCO wants to work with Socialist Alternative. We do not see them as enemies. But they are nevertheless a sect which portrays themselves as the beginnings of a party. The RCO views a much broader base as the beginnings of the party.

The socialist movement as a whole, Stalinists and Third Worldists, Trotskyists and Left-communists are welcomed given they accept a democratic structure and minimum/maximum program. We are not scared of thought taboos - we believe they must be engaged with in open debate to be understood and moved beyond. We cannot wait for the workers to rise up. If we are fragmented when they do, we will just be swept along in a tailist fantasy of spontaneity and revolutionary putsch attempts.

The party is our task as revolutionaries. Let us not forget that. ■

CPA Conference in session. Photo: SEARCH

Building a movement requires criticism

Criticism and counter-criticism is dime a dozen in the communist movement. But, ***Anthony Furia*** *writes, it is a necessary step toward building a principled communist organisation capable of leading the workers movement to power.*

Recently, a letter was published as a response to my own on the 'stop killing women' rallies (LETTER: Let's build a women's movement! But how?). Composed by comrade Porco, this article highlights disagreements with several aspects of my own short letter, some of which I believe are highly constructive; and others which represent serious political errors. I will keep this response-to-a-response brief, although I believe some of the issues raised by Porco are in fact due to the brevity of my initial letter, so here I will attempt to be more thorough in my approach. It should also be noted here that comrade Porco and I attended different rallies, in different cities, and thus likely came away with different political experiences altogether. Perhaps the lack of a cohered national messaging or political project of such protests is itself a point of critique.

To turn comrade Porco's reply on its head, and address the final substantial arguments first, I agree with the assessment that the political content[1] of spontaneous movements or struggles is in fact a damning indictment of the sect model and the failure of communists to present a structural, total political alternative in the form of a communist party. This is an indisputable fact; it is a significant aspect of the necessity for the construction of such a party, and the unification of the socialist movement behind it. The communist movement has failed, currently lies fractured and disparate, and our job is to change this.

To acknowledge this, however, is not to accept the notion that "these articles [referring to both my letter and comrade Edith's article on the need for a communist women's movement] are for a later date". Here we approach the second element of comrade Porco's critique; that the critical evaluation of these spontaneous struggles proffered by letters such as mine is 'finger wagging.' That putting forward the necessity of a communist movement for these struggles, as is done in articles such as comrade Edith's, is 'shouting

[1] I say content as opposed to nature here, as the Red Heart Campaign responsible for organising them is, it cannot be emphasised enough, an expressly memorial project, whose external political content appears to come not from embedded aims but from individuals as speakers

from the rafters.'

I will not step through, moment for moment, comrade Porco's article. I recommend comrades read it in full, if they have not already. Finger wagging, according to comrade Porco, is "belittling and self-congratulatory" when conducted without the already established importance and involvement of communists in other political tendencies (those subjects of critique). Without pre-existing discussion between the RCO and "grassroots feminist organisations," such finger-wagging is allegedly politically pointless and unproductive. This extends to 'shouting from the rafters', that is, positing alternative organisational forms with regards to struggles, which is, according to comrade Porco, meaningless when confronted with the reality of socialist disorganisation and fragmentation.

What the article thus seems to suggest with regards to the 'stop killing women' protests and the red heart campaign behind them, is that communists should withhold their critique of such forms until they represent a serious, cohered alternative to them. That, until the formation of a communist party (or to be more sympathetic, a formidable, militant, pre-party organisation), communists should not critique the apolitical, sometimes downright reactionary, demands and politics of such movements. Through holding our collective tongue, through concealing our differences so as to not stifle these seeds of struggle, communists can engage with such struggles, and with the organisations leading them, more effectively.

There are a few problems with such an argument. Somewhat alarmingly, the central thrust of my (perhaps too brief) letter was that, when practical political demands were raised by this 'movement', at the very least its manifestation in Melbourne, these demands were in the main manifestly right-wing. They centred punitive measures such as incarceration, harsher centering, and greater surveillance. These are not demands that are in any capacity conducive to women's liberation, nor are they demands of communists. Are we to ignore this until the emergence of a communist party? Until the 'masses' are provided a viable alternative? Surely not. Putting this aside for a moment, we can move to a grander issue with the argument presented; that is, the diminishing representation of criticism of a non-communist organisation as 'finger wagging' only suited to existing engagement with political tendencies or movements. This only partially portrays the practical political benefits of mounting such a critique.

Communists must have a basis on which to intervene in or to assess these movements. A negative criticism, in lockstep with a positive communist program, a communist alternative, is the extremely basic basis on which militant engagement into 'mass struggle' must necessarily take place. Of course, we can recognise the limited capacity for such engagement in the present, given the fragmentation of the socialist movement, but herein lies the second purpose of such critique.

Putting aside the extremely broad generalisation comrade Porco makes of the "majority of people" being apolitical or right-leaning (whatever that may imply), we should recognise that the audience for the RCO, as a partyist organisation, is not the "majority of people." It is precisely the socialist movement, in all its deficiencies, flaws, and limitations. To mount a criticism of a non-communist 'movement', or the seeds of such a movement, is to demonstrate the importance of cohered communist intervention, of a communist women's movement, to this 'socialist left'.

Furthermore, we as the RCO, and any communist party in the future, do not build our audience by concealing our political beliefs, our criticisms, our very politics, until there is some spontaneous 'radicalisation' of the masses to draw them to us. Any audience for a communist party, for a communist movement, is built upon the critical unity of theory and practice. Of course we must engage in these struggles, of course we must help (in the highly limited capacity that we are able to) in cultivating these seeds. But this cannot be separate from a consistent, disciplined critique of the direction in which these struggles develop, or the blatant rot that threatens to suffocate the seeds themselves.

Porco argues that articles such as these are for a "later date" when there is a communist movement. Putting aside that there is a communist movement (as neutered as it may be), I argue that these articles are the seeds for that later date. Just as the anti-femicide rallies may present the beginning of a broader movement, so too does consistent criticism, coupled with engagement and struggle, present the potential for something greater. For a communist women's movement, mobilised and cohered around a communist party. We cannot wait until the mass party to foster a culture and structure of criticism alongside struggle, of a unity of theory and practice, of the unrelenting, systematic application of a communist program. ■